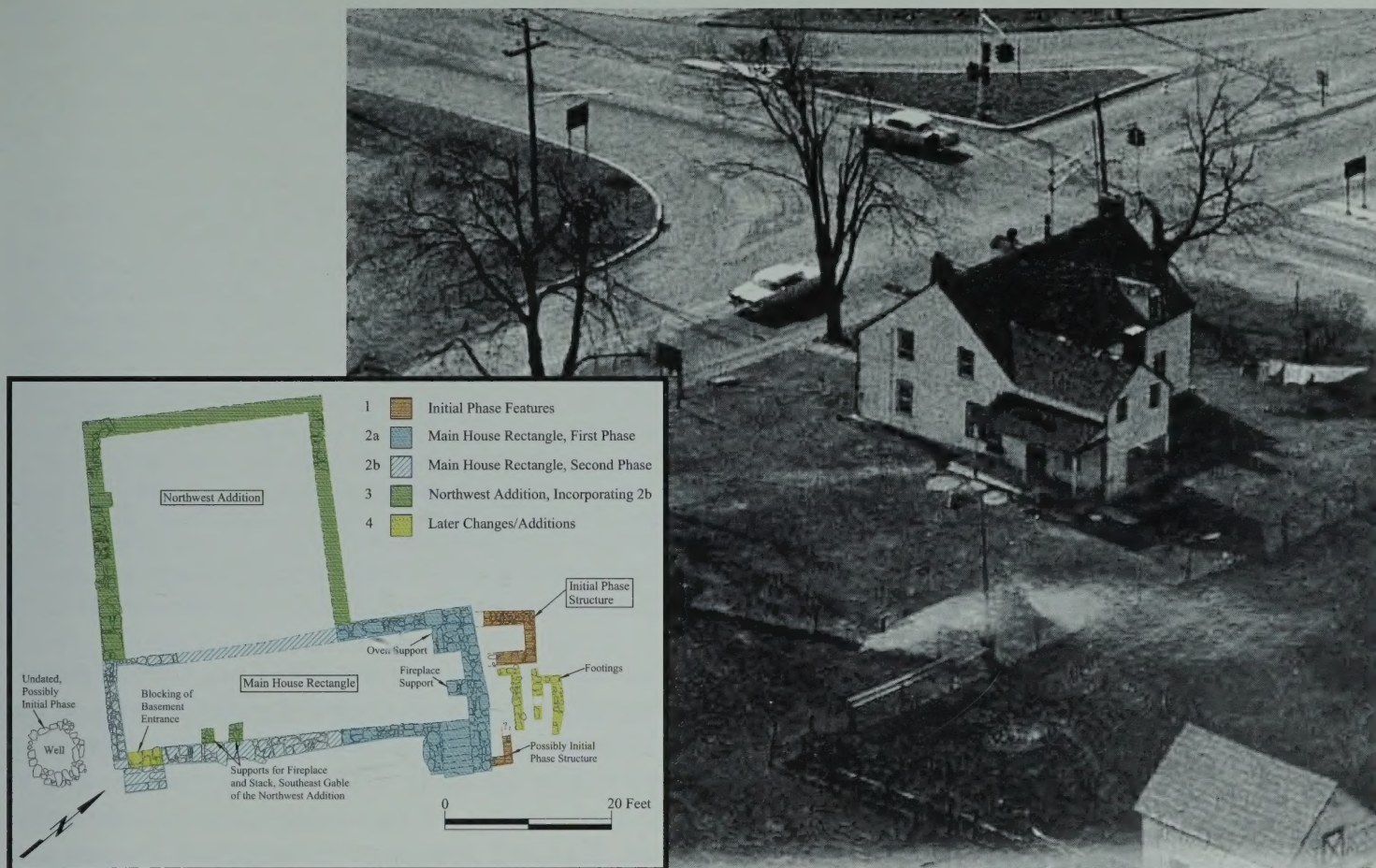


The Ross Farmstead, Frankford Township A 19th-Century Crossroads Dairy Farm in Sussex County



INTRODUCTION

Ross Corner is a small community at the intersection of two important early roads in Sussex County, roads that are today known as U.S. Route 206, N.J. Route 15 and Sussex County Route 565. These roads have their origin in two turnpike roads built early in the 19th century. These roads themselves probably followed even earlier trails.

The oldest route through Frankford Township is roughly followed by N.J. Route 15 from the Sparta area to the southeast, and by U.S. Route 206 northwest of Ross Corner. In 1806, an act of the New Jersey Legislature authorized the Union Turnpike Company to extend its road northwest from Sparta, through the Ross Corner area, and on to Culvers Gap and west to the Delaware River. The new section of

road was completed shortly after 1808, but it is possible that this construction merely formalized a pre-existing route.

The southwest-northeast route connecting Newton with Deckerton (Sussex Borough) may also have been created in part in the pre-turnpike era. The Deckertown and Newton Turnpike was incorporated in 1814, and the route through Ross Corner was completed by 1823. The intersection created when the Union Turnpike was crossed by the Deckertown and Newton Turnpike is depicted on an 1823 map in essentially its present configuration.

During the 1990s, increasing traffic along these roads prompted the New Jersey Department of Transportation to design improvements to the Ross Corner intersection. As part of the planning process

for the improvements, the Department was required under federal and state regulations to undertake research to find out if there were historic sites that would be damaged or destroyed by the improvements. This is a summary of what was found.

Archaeologists and historians established that the family who gave their name to Ross Corner built and lived in a house in the eastern quadrant of the intersection for much of the 19th century. Their house was torn down in 1975, but the foundation and other associated archaeological features remained in the ground. The site provided an opportunity to learn more about 19th-century life in this part of rural Sussex County, and to study the changes that took place to the house during its lifetime.

There were two main aims of the work. One was to study the kinds of artifacts that the Ross family and their successors had acquired, and the second was to investigate the development of the house itself. Efforts were then made to compare the results of the investigations at the Ross Farmstead with those from other similar sites in the area where research of the same kind had been carried out. The sites chosen were the Garrabrant/Abers/ Hunt and Montonney/House farmsteads at nearby Houses Corner, and other recently-excavated farmsteads in the Highlands, such as the Hamlin farmstead near Alpha, Warren County, and the P.J. Brown Farmstead on County Route 517 in Sussex County.

THE PEOPLE

Like the rest of New Jersey, this area was inhabited by Native Americans for thousands of years. Indian artifacts have been found along the Paulins Kill just to the south of the site, and two were found during the archaeological excavations of the farm. The first Europeans to settle in this area were Dutch and Huguenot immigrants, fleeing religious persecution in their respective countries. They settled first in New York and then along the northwest corner of West Jersey during the 17th century. The Depue, Ryerson, Westbrook and Schoonmaker families, descendants of these early Dutch and Huguenot settlers, helped establish what would later become Sussex County.

Archaeological Data Recovery

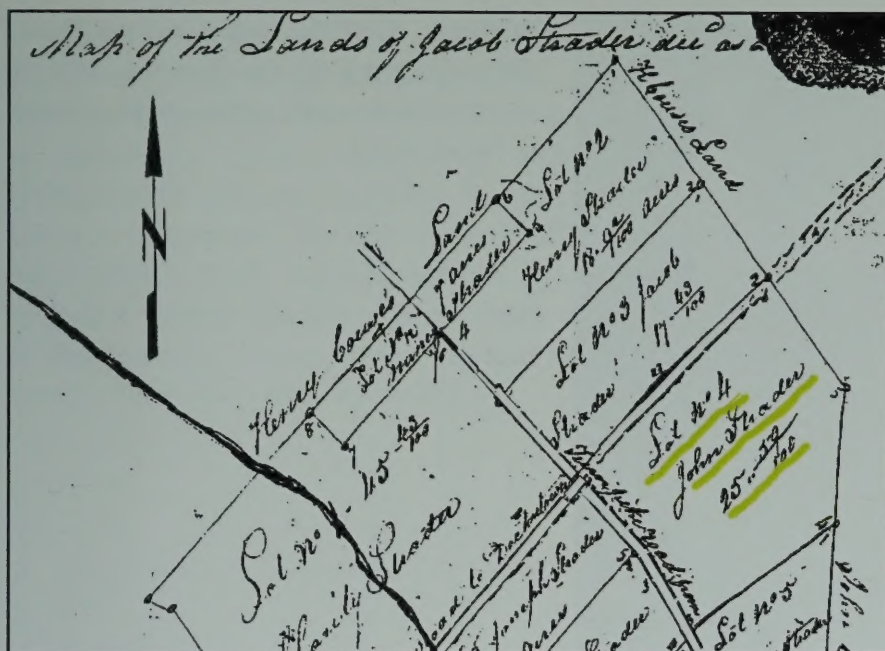
Depending on the size and significance of an archaeological site, and the extent of foreseeable disturbance, a carefully-planned program of *data recovery* may be the preferred treatment. Since data recovery by definition destroys the site (and with it, the context of the artifacts), it is usually reserved for instances where destruction of the site is unavoidable.

The process begins with preparation of a research design, posing questions the excavation should aim to answer. These may pertain to, as examples, the lifeways of the site's inhabitants, the nature of certain industrial or agricultural processes which took place there, or changes in the use of the site through time. Next, based on archival research and survey data (and, if necessary, the presence of hazardous materials), decisions are made as to how much of the site must be excavated in order to answer these questions; only rarely is an entire site excavated. The proposed locations or area of larger excavations are laid out, and the excavation proceeds.

As in other archaeological studies, soils, buried remains and key artifacts are exposed, photographed and mapped horizontally and vertically. Artifacts and samples of soils and other materials are taken to the laboratory for cataloguing, processing and (ultimately) long-term storage in a suitable repository. The archaeological team prepares a report of the study which, since it will be the only record of the site, is much more detailed than would result from a less complex archaeological survey. Typically the reports are generously illustrated and include chapters on background research, the testing phase, the research design, and the findings (including a full artifact catalog). Findings can also be reported in less-traditional media, such as a video production, school curriculum, posters or exhibits.

The land that was to become Ross Corner passed through the hands of several absentee owners in the 18th century, being steadily broken up into smaller and smaller tracts. In 1761 a large parcel was sold to Richard Stevens of Philadelphia for the substantial sum of £2,165, and the deed mentioned "Houses Out Houses Edifices Barns Stables," suggesting that there were tenants on the land by that time. An advertisement to sell 800 acres of this tract in 1772 stated that it had been "divided into farms, now on rent." In 1775 Henry Strader purchased property from this parcel, and a map made in 1816 of the Deckerton and Newton Turnpike shows Strader's lands. In 1823 it was reported that there was a turnpike gate for the collection of tolls on the Deckertown and Newton Turnpike "in front of the widow Strader's house," possibly in the vicinity of the later Ross farmstead.

The Ross family had relocated to Sussex County from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, during the Revolutionary period. In 1826, Jacob Ross, a native of Wantage Township, married Elizabeth Ryerson, the daughter of his tannery partner William A. Ryerson, a member of one of the early Dutch settler families.



By 1823, both turnpikes (the forerunners of today's Routes 15, 206 and 565) were in place, and their intersection formed what would become Ross Corner. The Ross Farmstead would take root in the eastern angle of the intersection, on the parcel labeled "Lot No 4 John Strader 25 59/100." [Source: S. C. Division of Land A 98, "Map of the Lands of Jacob Strader," 1823.]

In 1833, Elizabeth Ryerson Ross and Jacob inherited a northeast portion of the former Strader parcel of land, bound by the Union Turnpike, then known as "the turnpike road from Milford to Sparta." There is a possibility that Elizabeth and Jacob were already living here some years before 1833, perhaps since their 1826 marriage. For the next 70 years the Ross family farmed the land and improved their house

Information contained in the federal census reveals a great deal about changes in the family and the farm in a series of "snapshots" taken every ten years. The 1830 census listed Jacob Ross as a resident of Frankford; included in his household were his wife, two daughters (Mary and Oellah), two adult males, and a free black male child. In the census of 1840, Jacob and Elizabeth are listed as residing in a house with seven children, another adult male, and a young black woman. Two members of the household were employed in manufacturing, probably at the Ryerson tannery. It is most likely that this entry refers to Jacob Ross and the unnamed adult male living in the house at this time.

By 1850, Jacob Ross' listed occupation had changed from manufacturer to farmer. It appears that his involvement with the Augusta tannery had ended by this time. The Ross family had by now grown to include nine children.

Jacob and Elizabeth Ryerson Ross developed her inheritance into a productive farm. The farm was probably initially engaged in grain-based agriculture,

as was common at the time. By 1850, the farm consisted of 80 acres of improved land and 16 acres of unimproved land. The harvest from the previous year was 50 bushels of wheat, 100 bushels of rye, 500 bushels of Indian corn, 100 bushels of oats, 165 bushels of buckwheat, 150 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 15 tons of hay, along with 50 pounds of wool (indicating participation in the wool industry, which was later replaced by specialized dairying) and 720 pounds of butter. The family's livestock holdings were eight milk cows, four cattle, five horses, 20 sheep, and 15 swine.

The 1870 agricultural census recorded the Ross farmstead as still consisting of 80 acres of improved land and 16 acres of unimproved land. In this year the farm produced 20 bushels of winter wheat, 40 bushels of rye, 300 bushels of Indian corn, 200 bushels of oats, 50 bushels of buckwheat, 25 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 20 tons of hay. The livestock holdings were 17 milk cows, three cattle, four horses, and four swine. The increase in the size of the dairy herd shows that the Ross farmstead was now participating in a general trend towards specialized dairy farming in Sussex County.

The census enumerated Jacob Ross as a 76-year-old farmer residing at Ross Corner. The household had now expanded again and consisted of wife Elizabeth, eldest daughter Mary, sons Theodore and Walter and granddaughters Elizabeth and Mary Deazley. Also included were Phebe Stackhouse, a 15-year-old



William, Oellah, and George Ross, photographed at the Newton Inn at an unknown date. [Photograph courtesy of Dennis Ross.]

African-American servant, and Robert Mills, a 19-year-old farm laborer. The occupation of Theodore was not given, and Walter was listed as a farmer.

Jacob Ross died in 1878 at the age of 84; his widow Elizabeth maintained the farm until her death six years later. By 1880, the Ross family farm was operating at a reduced level. The household consisted of Elizabeth and Mary Ross, Mary Deazley, and a four-year-old child named Louisa Ross; her relationship to the family was not provided. The farm was listed in the agricultural census as having only 59 acres of cultivated land, 10 acres of pasture, and 10 acres of woodland. In the previous year the farm had utilized eight acres of grassland for the production of hay. Grain was confined to 31 acres and consisted of 150 bushels of rye, 70 bushels of Indian corn, 191 bushels of oats, and 78 bushels of buckwheat. One-half acre had produced 35 bushels of Irish potatoes. Only 300 pounds of butter were produced, down 62.5% from 1870. The family had also harvested several bushels of apples from the two-acre orchard. The dairy herd had been reduced, with only four dairy cows remaining from the 13 listed in the estate inventory of Jacob Ross in 1878. Additional livestock holdings consisted of four cattle, one horse, three swine, and 22 fowl.

When Elizabeth died in 1884, the 74.44 acres of the estate located in the east corner of the Ross Corner intersection passed to her son William P. Ross, who sold it in 1892. Between 1892 and 1901 the farm had three owners in quick succession. Between 1901 and

1936 it was owned by the Ackerson family. They sold it to Jacob Tanis in 1936, who incorporated it into his Ideal Farms dairying operation.

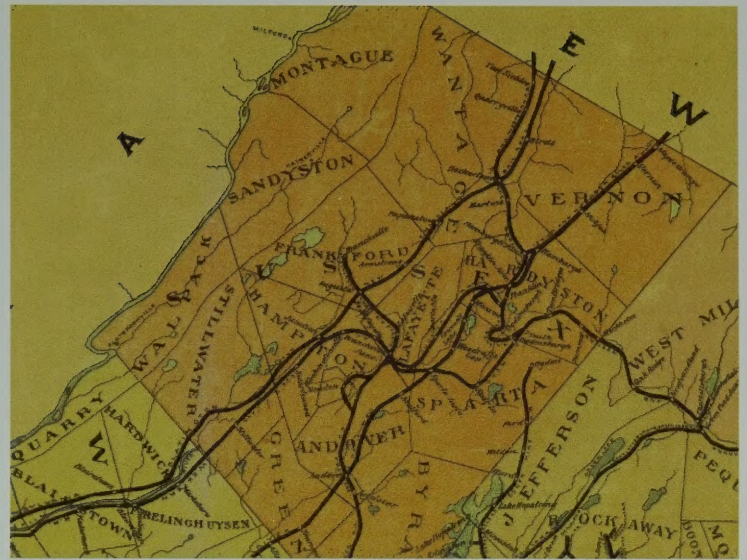
DAIRYING AT ROSS CORNER

Railroads were key in creating the dairy-farming specialization of Sussex County later in the 19th century and well into the 20th. Railroading began in Sussex County in 1848. By 1854 a line had been built as far north as Newton. Trains reached Branchville, two miles from Ross Corner, in 1868. The line to Franklin Township itself was completed in 1872.

The arrival of the railroads, followed by the development of refrigerated cars, encouraged an expansion of dairying activities in the region. The Sussex Railroad and other regional lines provided the means to ship dairy products to markets in New York City and to the rapidly growing industrial towns of New Jersey. In 1872 it was reported that many of the farmers of Frankford Township were now dairymen who produced butter and other goods for sale in New York City markets.

By the early 1880s Frankford and Lafayette Townships had well established dairy industries and a significant quantity of dairy products was sold to markets in and around New York City as well as across New Jersey.

Sussex County was well-served by railroads when this map was made in 1887, providing local and through service. This dense network of relatively speedy shipping, enhanced by refrigerated railcars, enabled Sussex dairies to serve customers in the metropolitan New Jersey/New York region, which in turn contributed to the County's prosperity at the end of the century. [Source: *Map of the Rail Roads of New Jersey*, John T. Van Cleef, New York.]



The Ross family were part of this new economic pattern, but the major period of dairying really came in the first half of the 20th century.

By 1910 three prominent landholders in the Ross Corner region - George Titman, J. Linn Bedell, and Case Ackerson - were engaged in dairy farming, the latter at the former Ross Farmstead. In 1936 Crina Ackerson sold the Ross property to Jacob Tanis, a resident of North Haledon, Passaic County, New Jersey. Tanis had been acquiring dairy farms in the area since 1927. He eventually acquired 21 properties in Sussex County, the majority of which were in Frankford and Lafayette Townships.

These properties were integrated into the substantial dairying operation called Ideal Farms. The epicenter of this operation was in Augusta, less than one mile to the northwest of Ross Corner. In 1943 Ideal Farms was described as a producer of milk, butter, cheese, and other dairy products, with the company employing 10 workers.

By the mid-20th century, however, the dairy industry in Sussex County was in slow decline. Ideal Farms closed the Sussex Borough creamery in 1962. Other creamery closures soon followed. Sisco Dairy Company Creamery and the Henry Becker & Son Creamery closed in 1964 following the end of milk car use on the Sussex line.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT THE FARM: THE ARTIFACTS AND THE BUILDING

Excavations at historic sites such as this one usually have several research objectives. Here the main aims were to understand the physical development of the house and the farmstead over time (especially in relation to the increasing importance of dairying), to study changing attitudes to trash and refuse disposal through time, and to examine the material culture of the Ross family.

In order to study these objectives archaeologically, the sites have to be well preserved, meaning primarily that artifacts and structural features have remained where they were placed and dropped and have not been mixed up by modern activities. At the Ross Farmstead it was discovered that the 1975 demolition had disturbed the soils more than expected, and in addition that some artifacts had been brought in to the site from elsewhere. This reduced the usefulness of the artifact collection as a source for the life of the Ross family. Fortunately, the house foundations were well preserved and it was possible to unravel the complicated history of the house.

THE ARTIFACTS

The two months of fieldwork undertaken in 1999 yielded 5,485 artifacts, overwhelmingly of 19th- and 20th-century origin. Well over half the recovered

The I-House

An I-house is usually defined as a two-story, center-hall house, with one room per floor on either side of the hall, with a gabled roof whose ridge is parallel to the main facade. Seen from above, therefore, the house resembles the letter "I," although one- or two-story ells projecting from the rear are not uncommon. Chimneys typically are on the gable ends of the house. The form arrived in North America with the earliest settlers and has been built nearly continuously since then.

A basic I-house is straightforward in design and therefore relatively easy to build. For these reasons, and because it is a traditional form familiar to the European settlers, the first permanent houses built in an area as the frontier pushed west tended to include I-houses. Examples are found throughout the East, the Midwest and the South.

With the application of design elements from various periods, the I-house could take on a variety of styles. Georgian, Federal, Gothic, or Italianate detailing could be added in the form of cornices, brackets, window sizes, or porches, for instance. In the 20th century, as the Colonial Revival styles became popular, ornament became less common and the basic form of the house re-emerged, until today the distant descendant of the I-house survives as the ubiquitous "Colonial" in real estate advertisements.

material consisted of ceramic and glass (45% and 19% respectively), and the bulk of the remaining artifacts (32%) were building materials.

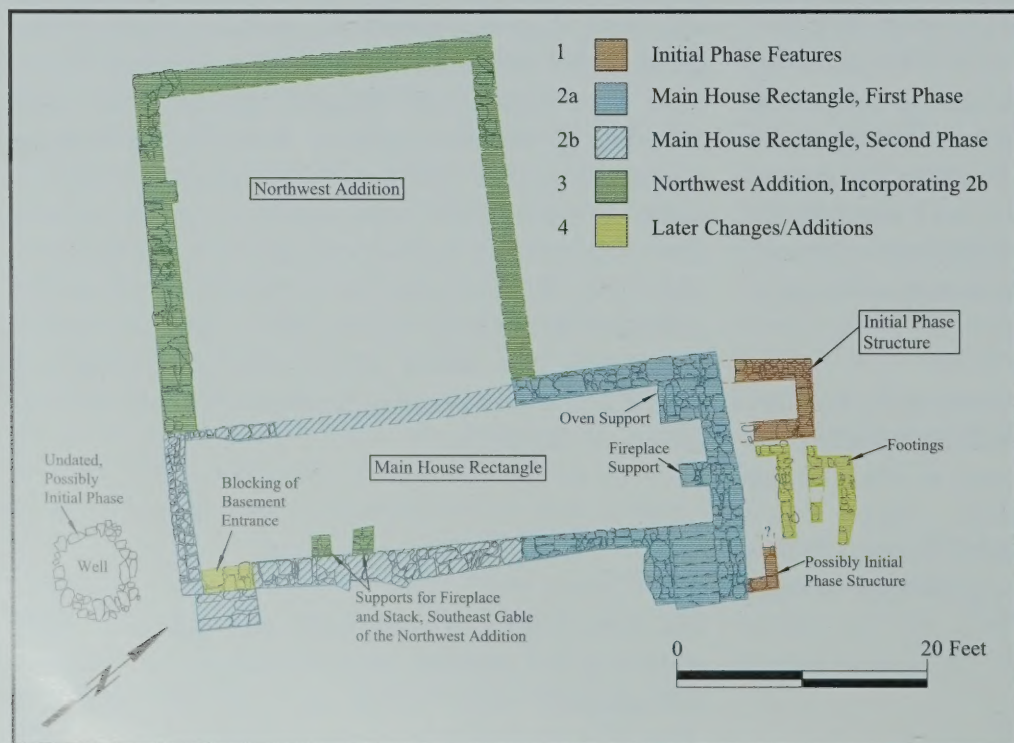
The information provided by the artifacts suggests occupation of the site from the mid-19th century into the third quarter of the 20th, which matches the historical record. There were no distinctively 18th-century artifacts, supporting the theory that the site was not developed before the first decades of the 19th century.

Careful comparisons were made between the artifact data from the Ross farmstead and from two properties at Houses Corner a few miles to the southeast. One of the Houses Corner sites, the Montonney/House Farmstead, was a farm like the Ross Farmstead. The other was a tenant house, usually lived in by non-farming relatives of the families in the Montonney/House Farmstead. The ceramics from the tenant house were different in character from those at the two farms. At the farms, utilitarian redware pottery was more common than at the tenant house, where the ceramics were also more "fancy," with more decorated pieces. Does this difference reflect different attitudes and social aspirations?

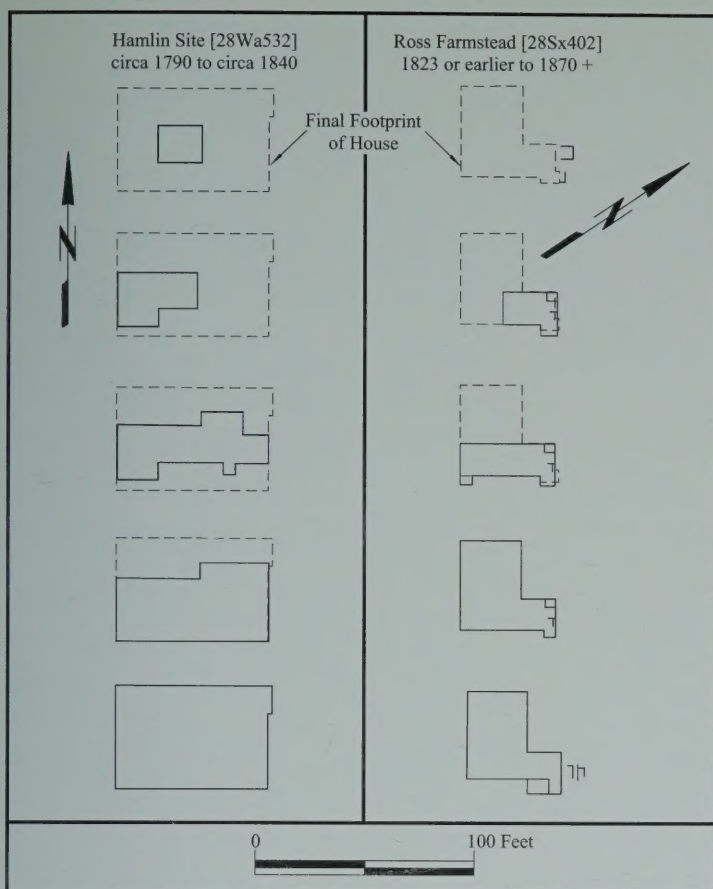
Animal bones provided another source of information about life at the Ross Farmstead. Wild animals as well as domestic species were identified, and hunting for food and for fur was evidently a part of life. The same was true at the Montonney/House Farmstead, and the two places seem to have been very similar.

THE HOUSE

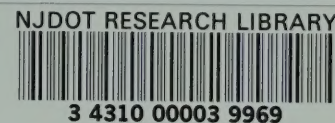
More informative than recovered artifacts, however, was the information about the evolution of the house itself derived from its subterranean remains. Based on analysis of structural evidence in the basement walls,



The phases of the Ross farmhouse through the 19th century, as revealed by archaeological investigation, are graphically shown in this foundation plan. Although the earlier phase of the main house apparently faced northeast, when the Northwest Addition was constructed the orientation was changed so the southwesterly facade became primary, probably late in the century.



This schematic compares the development of the Ross Farmstead house with that of the Hamlin Site house in neighboring Warren County. The houses are of similar age and were each occupied by members of one family for many years. In each case, the houses were enlarged to meet the families' changing needs for space.



extended the house to an overall length of 45 feet. The absence of fireplace supports suggests that the rooms above were heated by stoves. If this is true, Phase 2b is unlikely to have been built earlier than the second quarter of the 19th century by which time stoves were becoming more commonplace as heat sources.

The Northwest Addition incorporated Phase 2b, extended the house 28 feet to the northwest, and, significantly, reoriented the front of the house 90 degrees, to face southwest down the Union Turnpike. While no date can be definitively assigned to this addition, documents show that in 1870 the Ross household consisted of six adults, two granddaughters, a servant and a laborer. This period was also the peak of the Ross dairying operation and may have been a time of prosperity following the Civil War. This period appears to provide the best context for the Northwest Addition.

Other farms studied during the project showed a similar pattern. The best known is the Hamlin Site in Warren County, removed during the construction of Interstate 78. Like the Ross Farmstead, this property was owned by a single family for much of the 19th century and was added to and enlarged many times. By contrast, a recently-investigated site in Delaware, the Ward/Little Farm, had a different history. Here, transfer of ownership in the 1860s from the last member of the 18th-century "pioneer" family to a new owner resulted in complete rebuilding of the farmhouse, perhaps deliberately signaling a clear break with the former ownership. It may be that during the 19th-century continuity of ownership by a single family encouraged the gradual development and alteration of a house by successive generations, rather than total rebuilding.

and on the small areas of undisturbed soils around the building, the house can be seen to have been constructed in three main stages: an Initial Phase, the "Main House Rectangle," and the "Northwest Addition." These are shown in the illustration at left.

Only fragments were left of the Initial Phase building. Slight remains at the north end of the house appear to be fragments of a larger structure that was largely destroyed when the Main House Rectangle was built. While it is tempting to link this structure to the Straders who had the property before the Ross family, there is no hard evidence to support this suggestion, and its date is not known.

The Main House Rectangle is actually in two parts (Phases 2a and 2b). The more northeasterly Phase 2a had massive fireplace supports and basement stairs. It is believed to pre-date phase 2b. In this phase, the house would have been of the I-house type (see sidebar) with a central doorway on the southeast wall at the position of the doorway visible in a *circa* 1960 aerial photograph (reproduced on page 1). At an unknown later date, Phase 2b

For more information...

Burrow, Ian, William Liebeknecht and Susanne Eidson (Hunter Research, Inc.)

2001 *Archaeological Data Recovery at the Ross Farmstead Site (28SX402), Frankford Township, Sussex County, New Jersey.* On file, Historic Preservation Office, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Trenton.

Louis Berger & Associates, Inc.

1986 *The Hamlin Site, 1780 to 1856: A Study of Rural Consumer Behavior.* On file, Historic Preservation Office, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Trenton.

The RBA Group

1996 *Phase I/II Archaeological Survey and Reconnaissance-/Intensive-Level Historic Architectural Survey, N.J. Route 15/U.S. Route 206 Intersection Improvement Project, Ross Corner, Frankford and Lafayette Townships, Sussex County, New Jersey.* On file, Historic Preservation Office, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Trenton.

1999 *Archaeological Data Recovery Garrabrant/Abers/Hunt (28SX383) and Montonney House (28SX384) Farmstead Sites.* On file, Historic Preservation Office, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Trenton.

Project: Intersection Improvements, U.S. Route 206, N.J. Route 15, and County Route 565, Frankford Township, Sussex County, N. J.

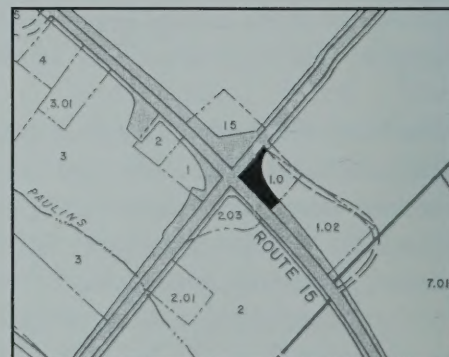
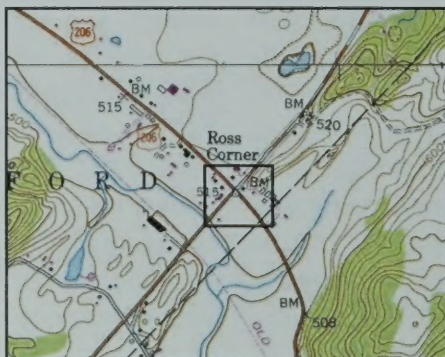
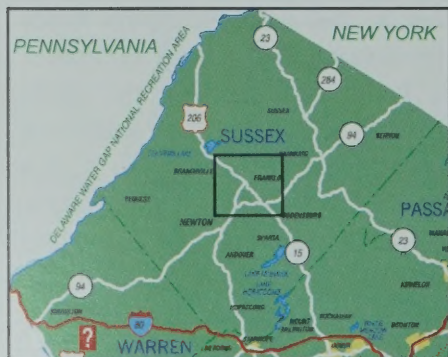
Sponsoring Agency: New Jersey Department of Transportation, 1035 Parkway Ave., Trenton, N. J. 08625

Site: Ross Farmstead Site [28SX402]

Excavation Dates: October-November 1999

Location of Artifacts: New Jersey State Museum, Trenton

Consultant: Hunter Research, Inc., 120 W. State St., Trenton, N. J. 08608



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